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ABSTRACT

Six critical variables in the mainstreaming of hearing impaired children include focusing attention on the child who has always been mainstreamed, monitoring the child on an intensive basis (preferably by the speech clinician), involving staff in inservice training and consultative services, considering parents as members of the team, convincing parents to use their power to influence administrators, and teaching school counselors to deal with hearing impaired students. (LS)

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Mainstreaming The Hearing Impaired Child: Critical Variables

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With the advent of mainstreaming, increased numbers of children who bear the labels of deaf and/or hard of hearing are now being integrated in regular classes with their hearing peers. Integration is being done in the preschool, elementary and secondary schools across the country. Though, as most reports point out that we are accommodating our hearing impaired students within their "home schools", it can still be said that we are not looking at the entire range of hearing impaired students which make up the regular school population.

A critical variable, and I'm drawing on my previous experience with the Title III Interdistrict Project for Hearing Impaired Students, and my present experience as Speech Clinician/Hearing Consultant for the Minneapolis Public Schools, looking us in the face is the fact that we are focusing little, if any, attention to the hearing impaired student who has always been "in the mainstream." Our attention is usually given to that student returning from a program within a self-contained classroom for the hearing impaired.

By "in the mainstream" I'm referring to those students who are identified as hearing impaired, usually with two aids, but have never been assigned to a self-contained classroom for the hearing impaired. The students' high level of skills and degree of hearing loss did not dictate placement in a self-contained classroom. I maintain that this type of hearing impaired mainstreamed student needs adequate monitoring and supportive assistance as one returning back to the home school from a self-contained program.

The second critical variable is recognizing that mainstreamed hearing impaired students need to be monitored on an intensive basis and deciding who this person will be. I propose that this charge be delegated to the speech clinician. The speech clinician has been chosen for a variety of reasons, none of which has to do with my being a Speech Clinician. The speech clinicians can be an effective liaison to the special program staff and to the regular school staff by virtue of the academic training received in their respective colleges and universities.

The speech clinician will usually be the one person on a regular school staff who will have knowledge about (1) hearing, (2) hearing loss, (3) hearing aids, (4) audiograms, (5) procedural adaptations regular teachers need to make to accommodate the hearing impaired student, (6) the ideal communication environment for the hearing impaired student, (7) steps schools can initiate to make listening more pleasurable (carpeting of classrooms and halls, lunchrooms, draperies, acoustical tile), (8) assessing the speech and language needs of the child and (9) working with their colleague, the audiologist.

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A third variable is convincing the building administration that the mainstreamed hearing impaired child will usually not be successful in his home school if the staff doesn't partake of the inservice training and consultative services available. More often than not a building staff is quick to say that there is not time for inservice training and frequent formal case management meetings which are both a necessity if the hearing impaired child is to realize his full educational, social and vocational potential.

A fourth critical variable is convincing a school staff that parents of the mainstreamed hearing impaired child should be considered as members of the team. The school team should be composed of all of the teachers and disciplines which have contact with the hearing impaired student assigned to a regular classroom. Needless to say, the child should also be considered a valuable team member. Having all school personnel concerned with the hearing impaired child in the regular classroom will:

1. Allow every team person to know about the child's schedule and expectations for the same.

2. Allow the team members to present to the tutor or resource person those concepts or items the student needs additional help with. Teachers usually forget this reponsibility if there isn't a frequently scheduled time for this exchange.

3. Allow for every teacher as well as the parents and child to come up with a workable, realistic and challenging educational program for the mainstreamed hearing impaired student.

A fifth variable is convincing parents to seize and use the power which is theirs. Parents need to insist that school boards and school administrators give just as many funds as they do speeches about being committed to mainstreaming our hearing impaired students. Whether a school district decides to give appropriate funding for mainstreaming will depend on how well parents as a group are organized. A definite correlation can be seen in terms of funding received and the type of parent organization in existence.

Because school board officials and special education administrators still do not yet understand the nature of hearing loss they tend to allocate funding accordingly. Oftentimes than not, special education administrators think in terms of expending many funds toward mainstreaming those students who are EMR, SLBP, etc. while giving what remains to the efforts of integrating our hearing impaired students. Parents who are effectively organized can change this!

Who better than parents can insist that new schools being built as well as existing ones should conform to acoustical standards which will benefit both the hearing impaired and normal hearing population?

School districts need to establish some mechanism which will provide for teen-age mainstreamed hearing impaired students to get together with each other. During my work as hearing consultant for the district the question most asked is, "Are there other students like me in the schools?" Perhaps a club run by and for the students could be an answer. Or a welcome and get acquainted social at the beginning and, an end of school social at the close of school could meet this need.

Then, too, a "regional" type social could be the answer. This would encompass hearing impaired students from adjacent school districts getting together. Whatever route districts wish to take, they should keep in mind that hearing impaired students need the companionship and socialization of others like themselves.

My last critical variable is that school counselors need to be taught not to treat mainstreamed hearing impaired students as just a number among their caseload.

Just like any other student whose vocational aspirations are met on the basis of his or her potential and school performances, the mainstreamed hearing impaired student should be accorded this same privilege. Efforts have to be made for the students' vocational interests to be coordinated through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Vocational Technical Institutes, colleges, universities and the student's counselor.

Oftentimes, the students' counselors have as their one great fault that of concluding that anyone with a hearing deficit, especially those who are aided, will be of low academic ability. Counselors, as persons of other disciplines, should keep in mind that whatever vocational aspirations the hearing impaired child has should be in line with his or her potential and academic performance in the mainstreamed setting.

Of critical importance is that those of us in the forefront of mainstreaming our children should work at getting statistics through research as to whether mainstreaming is working or is not working. We are in need of answers which will help us to plan more effectively for the mainstreamed child. Research dealing with the child's academic and social behavior in the regular class would be a start.

If the mainstreamed hearing impaired child is expected to exist and participate in our society without any preconceived hang-ups, a team effort has to be undertaken. This team effort has to be initiated and implemented on a serious basis by all disciplines involved with the child.

To realize this goal is to know that we've only just begun!

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Students.

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